

Our Contributors.

CONCERNING THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

A short time ago some of the Presbyterian papers on the other side of the line wrestled with the question, What should a General Assembly be and do? What a General Assembly should be is a problem that need not be discussed farther than to say that the Supreme Court of a Presbyterian Church should be good. In fact we should all be good, whether we are members of the Assembly or not. Goodness is the quality most needed in the human family at all times. Like a motion to adjourn, goodness is always in order. We need money badly enough, we need learning, we need working power, some of us need more common sense, but we need goodness more than we need any of these things. Goodness is the greatest power in the Church or in the world. A little more goodness would not hurt our politics at the present time.

What a General Assembly should do at any given time must be determined by circumstances. What it usually does is easily stated. It reviews the work of the past year, fixes up the machinery a little, and cuts out more work for the next year. Sometimes it does this quickly and sometimes slowly, sometimes wisely, and sometimes otherwise. It would never do for a General Assembly to be perfect. A perfect Assembly would go right through the standards. The Supreme Court must always be loyal to the standards, even when these venerable symbols say that perfection cannot be attained in this life. Most of us can live up to that particular doctrine.

The Home Mission Committee tells the Assembly what they have done in their vast field during the year. They also tell the Fathers and brethren how much money they have spent and how much they want for next year. They close their report with some recommendations in the way of improving the Home Mission machine. The Home Mission machine is not wicked like the political machine. The Fathers and brethren listen to the report respectfully of course, but as they have already read the whole thing and studied it carefully, and marked paragraphs on which they intend "to say something," they do not need to work as hard in the listening line as people sometimes have to work in listening to sermons. Usually the report is received, its recommendations adopted, thanks given to the committee, "especially to the convener," and the Assembly finishes its Home Mission work. Doing all this is easy compared with travelling over the rocks in Muskoka, or driving over the prairies on a buckboard. We have travelled between stations on the independent railway; we know all about the construction of corduroy bridges; we have preached in at least one church that was well ventilated because the roof was a tree top and the building had no sides; we have seen others doing Home Mission work under a great variety of circumstances, and we do honestly declare that the easiest place in the Church to work the Home field is in the General Assembly.

The Foreign Mission Committee report to the Assembly what they did in their various fields during the year, give the number of their missionaries and other laborers, tell how their balance stands and say how much money they would like for future operations. They also usually suggest some changes in the machinery. As the years go by and the Church moves on, new or altered conditions always demand some adjustments of the Church machine to ever changing circumstances. Of course the Supreme Court gives proper attention to the Foreign work. But after all, how much can the average man do for Foreign work beyond paying and praying? The work is confessedly difficult. New problems are continually arising.

Much of the knowledge necessary for the solution of these problems is special—not merely special as regards the whole work, but special in regard to the particular field in which the problem may have arisen. The easiest and best way to do Foreign Mission work is to allow the committee to attend to it.

There is no place in the Church in which it is so easy to train students for the ministry as in the General Assembly. When the college reports are read all a member has to do is just rise and make a little speech on college work. Telling the professors what they ought and ought not to do is about the same thing as telling a pastor how he ought or ought not to preach,—how he should or should not do his pastoral work. We all enjoy homilies from our parishioners on the manner in which we should discharge pulpit and pastoral duty, and it would be selfish to withhold similar enjoyment from our professors.

The Augmentation people tell the Assembly how they are getting on. Sometimes the Assembly helps them in their labors by putting a few congregations on the list as "special cases," and members of future Assemblies object to these special cases and threaten to withdraw support from the fund because these special cases are there. There is no place in which a man can work the Augmentation scheme so easily as from his seat in the General Assembly. It is almost as easy as sitting in a cushioned pew in church and saying how sermons ought to be made and preached.

All the other committees tell the Supreme Court what they did, and the Assembly does its part by attending to the reports. Far be it from us to say that this annual review of work done is unnecessary. It is absolutely essential to the very existence of the Church. The Church must do it or die. Let us all be thankful that criticizing, receiving and adopting reports is such easy work. If these exercises were as hard as doing the work passed upon most of us would be in our graves or on the Aged and Infirm ministers' Fund.

REV. D. J. MACDONNELL AS A MINISTER AND A MAN.*

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At the very close of the Old Testament era this statement is made as to God's faithful people: "Then they that feared the Lord spake with one another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name." In a quarter of a century God has given us but one such call to reflection as this in the breaking of the pastoral tie. What is the essence and burden of the call? Beyond all question the most outstanding fact in the reminiscence of the last twenty years is the personality of our minister.

Now we want to speak and think of him just as he was for our own sakes, and for the great love he bore to us, and the well grounded love we had for him. We have read and heard much of the admiration and affection with which our departed pastor was regarded far and wide. The press and pulpit of the whole land have raised their voice, and that a mighty voice, sounding loud and deep, even from the remotest east and west, as though the far-off murmur of the Atlantic and the Pacific shore had fallen upon our ears. And friends have been with us, and right well have they spoken of him whom they loved and honored. But sympathizing with us though they did, and speaking true and kindly words, they were yet not of his flock, not of his household; they cannot sound the depths of our peculiar grief, or rise to the heights of our peculiar joy. We were his in the great work and achievement of his life; and he was ours, with something of the devotion of an army to its leader, with something of the rever-

ence of a family towards its head, with something of the loyalty of a clan to its chieftain.

And is he not still ours, though in a somewhat changed relation? Does not the change only show how strong and sure is the bond that binds us to him, even though we are now linked with him by memory alone, and have no more with us the sound of his voice, or the gleam of his eye, or the touch of his hand?

How close and binding is the tie which united us to him we have all felt. It was perhaps most strongly brought out in one of those critical instances which illustrate character, and distinguish a life or a career. Two years ago, just one hour after that light had suddenly gone out which had gladdened and adorned his life, it was suggested to him that we would be able to have the Good Friday morning's service performed without his presence, and he said simply, "Why should I not go? I should like to be with my people." Greater love than this could no minister have for his congregation.

In looking back upon the life and work of our minister, what do we find?

Let us see. He was an eloquent man; he preached beautiful sermons; he was popular, and had a very attractive personality; he was in short a man to be proud of as a minister. But this is surely not the whole or the main outcome of a quarter of a century of service.

What would he himself desire that we should find? Though he deprecated mere admiration, he, like every other strong nature, craved influence. What gives a man personal influence? His moving thoughts and his strongest imitable qualities. What were such elements of influence in him?

We shall need to study the man lovingly and critically to gain the best lessons of his life. For the qualities that made tens of thousands mourn his untimely end did not lie on the surface, but rather shone through it from deep lying sources within.

Here we can only make a selection. Mr. Macdonnell's greatest work was done in the pulpit. How shall we explain his power? Not from his intellectual endowments alone, for perhaps his moral qualities were greater. As a preacher he had such obvious gifts as culture, style, judgment, passion. But we may single out one characteristic as most comprehensive. I mean his clear sightedness. He was distinguished especially for his power in two directions: in expounding God's word, and in handling the great themes of God's providence. In both directions he was scholarly and practical, simple, clear and profound. The secret of his greatness was that he saw things so clearly in their intrinsic character and in their relations. Clearness of mental and spiritual vision implies both insight and foresight. Insight made him a great interpreter. Insight and foresight combined made him a prophet. But these gifts were as much the result of study as of natural endowment. No trained student could sit under him and hear his expositions without feeling that a practical master was dealing with each subject. His knowledge of the original languages of the Bible, acquired in early years, was continually utilized as an instrument. But because he regarded it chiefly as an instrument, he was careful not to obtrude it while giving the rich results to us, his pupils.

Perhaps he wielded greater popular effect in dealing with themes of redemption and grace. Here the larger qualities of mind and soul found ample play. What broad and profound views he impressed upon us with regard to the essential character of God—not the God of the schools or of the clashing creeds, but the God of Revelation and of History, the God of the united consent of the prayers and hymns of Christendom! What true and helpful views also of man—of man as weak, sinful and sinning, and therefore all the more the object of the pity and redeeming grace of God! But the theme that seemed to be dearest to him, energizing mind and soul and body, was the meeting and reconciliation of God and man

through the God-man, the Christ. His sermons on the atonement alone are worth a library of current theological treatises, for insight, for cogency, for inspiration. "The simple things," he said, "are the great things in divine motive and action as well as in human life. The simple truth of the atonement is the love that gave us the Saviour." This supereminent fact dwarfed all others in his view; and therefore the obscurities of the lower levels of the problem were of lesser importance. In this he declared what his own spiritual eyes had seen, and hence he strove mightily to right the wrong that had been done in making the lower and less divine and less intelligible elements of the doctrine, the higher and the more urgent upon our belief and thought.

And thus, also, according to him, the regeneration of society and of the race is to be accomplished by this love of the atoning Christ working in human hearts. You remember his representations of the world as it might be, and as it is to be when permeated by this potent influence. I have said that he was a prophet. Such he was, because, like a true seer, he could not help revealing what he had seen. Unconsciously he mirrored himself in presenting his ideal—that age and race of men renewed by grace and inspired by love—

"Whereof the man that with us trod
This planet, was a noble type,
Appearing ere the times were ripe,
That friend of ours who lives in God."

Another conspicuous quality in him was reverence—reverence for God, reverence for men, reverence for the truth about God and man. I need not remind you of this feature in his pulpit ministrations. As I heard one of you remark not long ago, "The very rustle of his gown as he passed us on the way to the pulpit seemed to suggest his reverence." This, along with his good taste and discernment, was the main secret of his much talked of success in making the church services such a symmetrical and pleasing unity. He knew the value of form and order. But the same form and order without the informing spirit, might have robbed our simple and noble ritual of all its dignity and impressiveness, and made it a wearisome formality.

You remember how often in his discourses he seemed to bring God near to us. It was this very nearness of God to him that gave to his reverence its distinctive quality, and, indeed, made the whole nature of the man beautiful and sublime. With every surprise he was on the mountain-tops, and so he bore about with him the whole day long the radiance of a vision of God. We know how genial and winsome were his ways, how cheery his speech, how hearty his laugh. But a friend comes and talks to us of him and says, "He seemed to me to be always praying." Is the one picture more true and life-like than the other? No, for the whole man was revealed in both. In whatever he did we could always and everywhere see the spirit of God. Equally distinctive of him was his rare power of sympathy. This quality was largely based upon those already dwelt upon. Nature had much to do with such a rare endowment, giving him a quick, responsive, sensibility, a large humanity, a spontaneous feeling of kinship with his kind. But something more than natural impulse was needed to change the sentiment of fellowship into the habit of loving. Sympathy is not merely a feeling for others, but feeling directed by knowledge. Carlyle says "the king among men is the man who knows." Our minister went far to prove that the king of men is the man who knows and feels. In his special sphere of life and thought the knowledge required was of the practical kind, an acquaintance with the actual needs and weaknesses of men. Without this his life might still have been beautiful, but it would have been unsubstantial—a dew-laden cobweb of sentiment, glistening in the sunlight of enthusiasm. But just as his reverence assumed the practical form of de-

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